

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NOUAKC 02381 201047Z

15

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

TO RUEHCWMSECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4693

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION USUN NY

CINCEUR

CINCUSNAVEUR

COMSIXTHFLT

FOSIF ROTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 2381

E.O. 11652: XGDS (1)

TAGS: PFOR PBOR MR AG MO SS SP

SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: SITUATION ALONG MAURITANIAN-SAHARA
BORDER

SUMMARY: ACCORDING TO FRENCH EMBOFF, FRONT POLISARIO
TOOK CONTROL OF LA GUERA, SOUTHERMOST TOWN IN WESTERN
SAHARA, AFTER DEPARTURE OF SPANISH. POLISARIO IS RE-
PORTEDLY CONSOLIDATING ITS POSITION IN OTHER SAHARAN

POPULATION CENTERS. BY TIME SPANISH DEPART SAHARA
EARLY NEXT YEAR, FRONT POLISARIO MAY ALREADY HAVE SET
UP ITS OWN ADMINISTRATION. CONSEQUENTLY, ARMED
CONFLICT BETWEEN FRONT POLISARIO AND INCOMING
MOROCCANS/MAURITANIAN ADMINISTRATORS IS WELL WITHIN REALM
OF POSSIBILITY. END SUMMARY.

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PAGE 02 NOUAKC 02381 201047Z

1. IN DISCUSSION NOVEMBER 19 WITH EMBOFF, FRENCH

EMBASSY COUNSELOR JACQUES MILLOT PROVIDED MOST AUTHORITATIVE ACCOUNT WE HAVE HEARD SO FAR ON CURRENT SITUATION ALONG MAURITANIAN-SAHARAN BORDER. FRANCE MAINTAINS CONSULATE IN NOUADHIBOU, NORTHERN MAURITANIAN PORT CITY WHICH BORDERS ON SOUTHERN TAIL OF WESTERN SAHARA. MILLOT ALSO DISCUSSED SITUATION THREE DAYS AGO WITH RECENTLY DEPARTED SPANISH RESIDENT OF LA GUERA, SOUTHERNMOST TOWN IN WESTERN SAHARA.

2. MILLOT REPORTED THAT VIRTUALLY ALL SPANISH CIVILIANS AND MILITARY HAVE LEFT LA GUERA. (TOWN HAD POPULATION OF ABOUT 2,000 AT BEGINNING OF SPANISH EVACUATION; NUMBER OF SPANISH NATIONALS IN THIS FIGURE IS UNKNOWN.) ON APPROXIMATELY NOVEMBER 8 ELEMENTS OF FRONT POLISARIO TOOK OVER LA GUERA AND CONTINUE TO HOLD IT TO PRESENT DAY. MILLOT SAID THAT TWENTY-SEVEN ALGERIAN TRUCKS ARRIVED RECENTLY IN LA GUERA-NOUADHIBOU AREA WITH SOME SEVENTY FRONT POLISARIO TROOPS. SEVERAL OF THESE TRUCKS REPORTEDLY ENTERED NOUADHIBOU TO BUY SUPPLIES. THESE SEVENTY FRONT POLISARIO TROOPS, AND POSSIBLY OTHERS RECRUITED LOCALLY, HAVE INSTALLED THEMSELVES IN LA GUERA AND ALONG WESTERN SAHARA/MAURITANIAN FRONTIER. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTION, MILLOT SAID TRUCKS PASSED THROUGH WESTERN SAHARA EN ROUTE TO SOUTHERN BORDERJM THEY DID NOT CORSS MAURITANIAN TERRITORY. MILLOT CONCLUDED THAT CONVOY COULD ONLY HAVE TAKEN PLACE WITH SPANISH COMPLICITY. MOREOVER, SINCE POLISARIO DID NOT NEED TWENTY-SEVEN TRUCKS TO TRANSPORT SEVENTY MEN TO LA GUERA, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT CONVOY DROPPED OFF SMALL CONTINGENTS AS IT PROCEEDED ACROSS SAHARA.

3. MILLOT NOTED IN PASSING THAT HE BELIEVES FRONT POLISARIO EITHER ALREADY HAS ESTABLISHED OR SOON WILL ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE CONTROL IN MAJOR POPULATED AREAS IN WESTERN SAHARA FILLING VACUUM CREATED BY SPANISH WITHDRAWAL INTO COASTAL REDOUBT. HE SERIOUSLY DOUBTS FRONT POLISARIO WILL PERMIT, WITHOUT RESISTANCE, MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA TO SET UP PROVISIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN SAHARA FOLLOWING DEPARTURE OF SPANISH. MILLOT FURTHER NOTED THAT IT IS HIS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 NOUAKC 02381 201047Z

IMPRESSION THERE IS SUBSTANTIAL SYMPATHY IN MAURITANIA, INCLUDING NOUAKCHOTT, FOR FRONT POLISARIO.

4. COMMENT: IF MILLOT IS CORRECT IN ASSUMING THAT ALGERIAN TRUCKS, WHICH TRANSPORTED FRONT POLISARIO PARTISANS, TRAVERSED SAHARA WITH KNOWLEDGE AND/OR ASSISTANCE OF SPANISH, IT SUGGESTS ONE OF SEVERAL THINGS. (A) SPANISH COMPLICITY TOOK PLACE DURING PERIOD WHEN SPAIN WAS

COURTING F POLISARIO AND PRIOR TO RECENT TRIPARTITE ACCORD. (B) SPANISH ACTION WAS CONTRARY TO ESTABLISHED POLICY BUT WAS LOCAL INITIATIVE OF SPANISH OFFICIALS ON SCENE. (C) SPANISH ARE PLAYING TWO GAMES AT SAME TIME, I.E., NEGOTIATING WSCY MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA WHILE SIDING AND ABETTING F POLISARIO.

5. IT APPEARS, IN EFFECT, THAT F POLISARIO IS QUIETLY AND RAPIDLY ESTABLISHING FAIT ACCOMPLI IN SAHARA. MOROCCANS AND MAURITANIANS CAN TALK ALL THEY WANT IN MADRID AND NEW YORK ABOUT PROVISIONAL ADMINISTRATION FOLLOWING DEPARTURE OF SPANISH. IN MEANTIME, F POLISARIO IS IN PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING ITS OWN ADMINISTRATION OF WESTERN SAHARA. IN ADDITION, AS ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR ASTUTELY POINTED OUT TO US RECENTLY, SHOULD SHOOTING WAR DEVELOP BETWEEN F POLISARIO AND INCOMING MAURITANIAN/MOROCCAN CIVIL AND SECURITY FORCES, IT WILL SHAKE MAURITANIAN REGIME TO ITS BOOTS. NUMEROUS SENIOR MAURITANIAN OFFICIALS, INCLUDING FOREIGN MINISTER MOUKNASS, HAVE CLOSE RELATIVES LIVING IN SAHARA. MAYOR (OR FORMER MAYOR) OF LA GUERA, FOR EXAMPLE, IS COUSIN OF MOUKNASS. BECAUSE OF FAMILIAL TIES ACROSS FRONTIER, SHOOTING WAR BETWEEN F POLISARIO AND GIRM WOULD BE EXCRUCIATING EXPERIENCE FOR MAURITANIA. HANDY SIDE

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